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ABSTRACT

In response to education reform mandates, rewards and incentives such as career ladder and master teacher programs are being designed to break lock-step salary schedules and to retain competent teachers. While these "pay-for-performance" plans seem acceptable to taxpayers, few realize that such approaches have already been tried and proved unsuccessful due to funding limitations and the nature of teacher motivations. In fact, competitive reward systems may foster outcomes antithetical to the best interests of public education. The present study describes the efforts of one rural district in southeastern Texas to develop and implement a nonmonetary incentive program to foster cooperation and communication among teachers. The professional incentive plan evolving from teacher preferences offered grants for special projects, summer institutes, and conferences or workshops. In April 1985 and November 1986, 151 teachers were administered a questionnaire to obtain their perceptions of six school climate dimensions, as well as the recent career ladder and nonmonetary professional incentive plans. Teachers' perceptions of career ladders were extremely negative; career ladders were seen as unrelated to the six school climate indicators. Teachers' perceptions of the professional incentive plan were significantly related to their views of the principal as a leader and their instructional interactions with students. Included are 3 tables and 25 references. (MLH)

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EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

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EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

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In the past five years, the publication of several national reports assessing the current state of our educational system (A Nation at Risk, 1983; the Carnegie Commission Report, 1986; the Holmes Group Report, 1986) has focused both public and professional attention on the development of professional reward systems for teachers. Public clamor for competency in the classroom and reports of teacher dissatisfaction with the profession have become commonplace topics of concern. Local districts repeatedly face the challenge of attracting and retaining the best of the work force at a time when the satisfaction of those within the profession is particularly low. A Louis Harris poll (1985) indicates that 27% of those teachers polled plan on leaving the profession within five years. When coupled with recent federal studies which indicate a 34% shortage of teachers by 1992, the problem becomes even more critical.

Reaction to this crisis has come in the form of sweeping legislative mandates, often bypassing many of the teaching professionals who must implement the programs. Rewards and incentives are being mandated in the form of career ladder and master teacher programs designed to break the lock step salary schedule and provide new ways to encourage competent people to remain in teaching. These plans incorporate a "pay for performance" approach which taxpayers appear

to support. A 1985 Gallup Poll (Kappan, 1985, p. 32) indicates that 74% of those adults questioned favored a career plan for teachers adopted by the public schools in their own communities.

Few people realize, however, that career ladder and master teacher programs have been tried in the past and have failed. The conditions which led to the failure of programs such as Temple City, California, in the late 1960s have not changed in the 1980s. (See Freiberg, 1985, for a historical overview of master teacher programs of the past 25 years.) Problems related to limits in funding are not the sole reasons for failure. The nature of teaching and the motivations of those entering the profession may actually contribute more to the downfall of these programs than the spectre of a financial time bomb for cost-conscious districts. Competitive reward systems may foster outcomes which run counter to the best interests of our educational system.

Teacher Cooperation vs. Competition

Career ladder programs which focus on individual rewards with opportunities for advancement limited to a select few (e.g., Master Teachers) will foster competition. Proponents of competitive systems often point to business as proof that the competitive, pay-for-performance concept works. This is a misconception, however, since, as Sergiovanni (1985) points out, "competitive assumptions are not reflected in the business practices of successful business firms." Competition in the business realm works best when it is "inter-organizational" rather than "intra-organizational." As is true in

business, "intra-organizational" competition in the teaching profession may have undesirable effects. A research study on educational reform related to merit pay, career ladder and teacher incentives which was commissioned by the Education Commission of the States, Denver, reports the following (Rosenholtz, 1985):

> (1) Research suggests that the schools with the greatest student learning gains are those which do not isolate teachers, but instead encourage professional dialogue and collaboration. Teaching in effective schools is a collective, rather than individual, enterprise.
>
> (2) Competitive rewards tend (a) to close rather than open communication and sharing among those who work together, (b) to bias comprehension of different viewpoints, and (c) to destroy trust among group workers.
>
> (3) Mutual encouragement and support by group members are substantially reduced in group settings, and their problem-solving capacity is diminished. In fact, competitive conditions may lead people to deliberately frustrate the attempts of others to succeed. (p. 351)

In summary, career ladder programs which require teachers to compete for limited rungs on a career ladder will not foster cooperation and communication or reduce the isolation faced by some teachers in the classroom.

Norm-Referenced vs. Criterion-Referenced Career Ladders

Presently, there are two types of career ladder programs in operation: (1) norm-referenced, and (2) criterion-referenced. Each type of career ladder will have a significantly different effect on the issue of cooperation and competition.

The career ladder concept by its nature produces a hierarchy in teaching. A norm-referenced career ladder plan (e.g., Temple City, the original career ladder components of the Tennessee Plan, and the current Texas and Florida plans) by design limits the number of teachers at the top of the ladder through funding limitations or fixed quotas. The norm-referenced career ladder relegates the majority of teachers to a future of limited opportunities, forced competition, and greater isolation.

Similar concerns were expressed in a 1973 report of the American Institute for Research report of the Temple City plan cited by Fenwick English (1995):

> The concept of a career ladder, which allows teachers to advance to higher levels of responsibility and income within the teaching profession, has proved largely impractical due to a lack of teacher turnover and absence of openings to which teachers can, in fact, advance.

Conversely, a criterion-referenced career ladder plan which uses, for example, advanced degrees, years of experience, or favorable classroom evaluations as bases for promotion, allows many more teachers to advance up through the hierarchy. In addition, this system reduces the

competitive factors by focusing teachers' time and energy on the criteria to be obtained rather than on each other. However, after a few years, the inverted pyramid may become a financial time-bomb for the school district or state funding agency if a fixed stipend is provided for each teacher who fulfills the requirements. Furthermore, the motivational factors for teachers may become diminished over time.

The type of career ladder or incentive program mandated by state or district action could have implications for their ability to attract and keep the best teachers, especially if the impending national teacher shortage becomes reality. In combination with a salary schedule comparable to similarly trained professionals in other fields, teachers need systems which provide them with professional incentives to improve their ability to function effectively in the classroom and which promote cooperation among teachers in achieving this goal. In order to be successful over time, these systems must promote outcomes that are consistent with individual district's goals, needs, and financial resources. Providing the flexibility for such options and alternatives is a key ingredient missing from current teacher incentive programs. Local initiatives in areas affected by top-down mandated career ladder programs will be necessary to avoid the undesirable effects of state-legislated programs. The present study describes the efforts of one district to accomplish the goal of developing and implementing a non-monetary incentive program.

Incentive Program

In the summer of 1984, teachers were administered a questionnaire designed to assess their current satisfaction with teaching and to identify non-monetary professional incentives which could be implemented by the district. Teachers were asked to identify (a) those elements which add or detract from their satisfaction with teaching as a profession, and (b) their level of interest in certain items as professional incentives. A task force composed of ten teachers and two administrators was formed to study this data and to make recommendations concerning the development and implementation of an incentive program for teachers in the district. Based on the survey responses, a structured interview was developed to probe ten questionnaire items related to teacher incentives. Using the interview results, the committee hoped to (a) gain additional information to enable them to define and structure a program based on teacher needs, and (b) uncover possible issues, problems, or misconceptions which might need to be addressed in order to facilitate successful implementation of the program.

Teachers surveyed indicated greatest interest in the following professional incentives:

(1) Participating in school improvement programs (79%)

(2) Participating in demonstration teaching programs (72%)

(3) Receiving a computer for classroom use (69%)

(4) Attending professional conferences (69%)

(5) Participating in teacher self-assessment programs to improve teaching skills (67%)

The follow-up interview data revealed Attending professional conferences, Participation in summer institutes, and Participation on school improvement teams as the top three choices. The increased popularity of the summer institute concept was, perhaps, due to a better understanding of the incentive after the interviewer explained that teachers would have the opportunity to define and structure these sessions themselves. The decrease in interest in participating in demonstration teaching programs appeared to be due to the realization that they, personally, would, perhaps, be asked to allow other teachers to observe them in the classroom. Most of the respondents who expressed no interest in this incentive cited their dislike of being observed by their peers as their main reason.

After reviewing these results, the committee divided into subgroups to discuss the findings and prioritize the incentives using both survey and interview data. The Superintendent and Director of Instruction worked closely with the group to contribute their knowledge of the resources of the district. The committee forged a plan which was flexible enough to appeal to kindergarten as well as high school teachers and which would respond to the needs of a changing staff. Finally, less than a year after the formation of the working committee, the Board of Trustees adopted the recommended Professional Incentive Plan. The plan included the following three components which were available to individuals, groups, grade levels, or departments:

(1). Special Project Grants:

A special project can be defined as a nonroutine, different, or innovative approach to teaching a particular unit, skill, or concept. A request for a special project grant may include funds for materials, for the use of special equipment for a specified period of time, or for paraprofessional assistance for a specified period of time. Additionally, special project grants may include funds for attendance at summer institutes, workshops, or conferences during the year which provide training that is related to the implementation of the project.

(2). Grants for Summer Institutes:

Grants for summer institutes are available for the purpose of funding participation in summer institutes related to the teaching assignment.

(3). Grants for Conferences or Workshops:

Grants for conferences or workshops are available for the purpose of funding participation in conferences or workshops during the school year or during the summer months that are related to the teaching assignment.

A committee comprised of teachers and administrators representing all the schools in the district was responsible for considering grant applications and determining the level of funding to be awarded. During the 1995-96 academic school year, 22 grants were funded in the district which involved 37 teachers. For the 1996-97 (until February 1,

1987) school year, 25 grants have been awarded involving 51 teachers. Average award per grant in 1985 was $304, and average award per teacher was $181. Average award per grant in 1986 was $323, and averge award per teacher was $158.

Data Sources and Methodology

Participants in this study were 151 teachers from a small rural school district in southeast Texas. Teachers were administered a school climate questionnaire in April of 1985 and again during the same month in 1986 to obtain their perceptions of six dimensions of school climate, as well as the recent state-mandated Career Ladder Program. Prior to the development of the state career ladder, the district introduced a non-monetary Professional Incentive Program which had been designed by a committee of district teachers and administrators. Teachers' perceptions of this program were assessed in conjunction with the 1986 school climate survey.

The School Climate Questionnaire for Teachers (Freiberg et al., 1980) contains six scales, each consisting of five items designed to assess teachers' opinions of the principal's role in their schools; teacher interactions with peers, administrators, parents, and students; and the physical environment. The specific scales include: Leadership Qualities of the Principal, Teacher-Peer Relations, Parent-Teacher Relations, Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations, Student-Teacher Instructionally Related Interactions, and School Building and Facilities. These scales have been found to be reliable, with alpha coefficients ranging from .55 to .85 (Pyper, Freiberg, Ginsburg, & Spuck, 1981). Additional scales

were included to determine teachers' perceptions of the effects of the statewide career ladder program on school climate in 1985 and 1986. In addition, the 1986 climate questionnaire included scales consisting of items to assess (a) teachers' opinions of the effects of the program on school climate, and (b) their actual or intended participation in the Professional Incentive Program implemented during the previous year by the district.

Teachers responded to each item on the questionnaire by indicating their level of agreement with statements on a Likert-type scale. Mean scores for each item and subscale were computed. A mean value near 1 means that teachers strongly agreed with that item or the items in the subscale and had a positive opinion of that dimension, while a value close to 5 reveals that teachers strongly disagreed with the statement or statements comprising the subscale and exhibited a negative perception of that dimension. A value near 3 can be regarded as an expression of uncertainty or neutrality for that item or subscale. Additionally, a series of open-ended questions relating specifically to the Texas career ladder were added to the end-of-school climate questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all subscales. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the six climate indicators and the career ladder subscale for 1985 and 1986, and the two incentive program subscales for 1986. Results revealed that teachers rated the six climate indicators positively for both 1985 and 1986. Also, for

both time periods, teachers viewed Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations as the most positive indicator of school climate, followed by Leadership Qualities of the Principal and Student-Teacher Instructionally Related Interactions. The Career Ladder was the only scale which was viewed negatively by the teachers for both years ($\bar{X}$s = 4.261, 4.264; SDs = .87, .86, respectively). Teachers' perceptions of the Professional Incentive Program ($\bar{X}$ = 2.98; SD = .94) and their participation in it ($\bar{X}$ = 2.98; SD = .94) were uncertain or neutral, perhaps suggesting a "wait and see" attitude. It should be noted that the standard deviations for these subscales are relatively large, suggesting variability in the responses to these items.

Canonical correlation analysis was employed to determine the maximum correlation between the set of second year school climate indicators and the external climate influences which include teachers' perceptions of the career ladder component of House Bill 72, perceptions of the Professional Incentive Program, and teacher participation in the program. Table 2 reveals that the canonical analysis produced one statistically significant canonical correlation coefficient with a magnitude of .50 ($p < .001$). The only external influence relevant to the canonical variate was Teachers' Perceptions of the Professional Incentive Program. The relevant climate indicators included teachers' perceptions of the Leadership Qualities of the Principal and Student-Teacher Instructionally Related Interactions.

Open-Ended Responses

A content analysis was conducted on the open-ended responses to the question number 32 which stated: "The effects of the career ladder components of HB72 have had a positive effect on school climate. Please explain." The teacher responses sorted into 11 categories. The 151 questionnaires produced 101 responses to the statement. Table 8 shows the ranking by number of each of the groupings. Of the 101 responses, 100 could be identified as disagreeing with the statement and one written response agreed with the statement. Responses relating to low morale/dissatisfaction, competition between teachers, and the fairness of the career ladder represented over 50% of the responses.

Discussion

Although teachers' perceptions of the career ladder were extremely negative, as evidenced by the mean scale scores for both years and the open-ended responses, the career ladder was not related to teachers' perceptions of any of the six school climate indicators. On the other hand, the canonical analysis revealed that teachers' perceptions of the Professional Incentive Program were significantly, positively related to their views of the principal as a leader and their instructional interactions with students. Perhaps the Professional Incentive Program acted as a buffer for the negative effects of the Texas Career Ladder by improving relationships in the two key areas involving interactions between teachers and the principal and teachers

and students. The absence of the Professional Incentive Program may have resulted in a much greater affect of the Texas Career Ladder on school climate.

The implications for school districts seeking to balance local, state and federal mandates are important. Districts need to provide the opportunity for teacher and administrator input and decision making into local programs and the negative elements of state or federal mandates could be reduced.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the School Climate, Incentive Program, and Career Ladder Subscales

	1985		1986	
Subscale	M	SD	M	SD
Leadership Qualities of the Principal	2.25	.71	2.33	.80
Teacher-Peer Relations	2.52	.54	2.62	.54
Parent-Teacher Relations	2.41	.56	2.28	.54
Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations	2.19	.47	2.11	.49
Student-Teacher Instructionally Related Interactions	2.40	.59	2.31	.56
School Building and Facilities	2.70	.77	2.85	.78
Career Ladder	4.26	.87	4.26	.87
Incentive Program	--	--	2.98	.94
Participation	--	--	3.20	1.02

NOTE: Mean values near 1 indicate a positive perception of the subscale. Mean values closer to 5 exhibit a negative perception of the subscale.

Table 2

Standardized Canonical Correlations for Teachers' Perceptions of School Climate and External Influences

	Canonical Variate
	I
School Climate Indicators	
Leadership Qualities of the Principal	.40
Teacher-Peer Relations	.20
Parent-Teacher Relations	.23
Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations	.67
Student-Teacher Instructionally Related Interactions	.05
School Building and Facilities	-.21
External Influences	
Career Ladder	.20
Incentive Program	.90
Participation in the Incentive Program	.09
Canonical r*	.50

*p < .001

Table 3

The Effects of the Career Ladder Component of HB72 have had a Positive Effect on School Climate

Frequency of Open-Ended Responses Using a Content Analysis:	
Causes low moral/dissatisfaction	24
Causes competition between teachers	15
Career ladder is applied unfairly	15
Evaluation instrument is unfair	13
People are on the career ladder who should not be	13
Causes competition between teachers and administration	8
Uncertainty of requirements	7
Criteria not worth the effort and money	2
More teacher input is needed	1
Creates no problems	1
No response	50